

WHAT'S UP?

ADVANCING FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

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OXFAM



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FEMINISM AT THE CENTER: OXFAM'S MISSION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

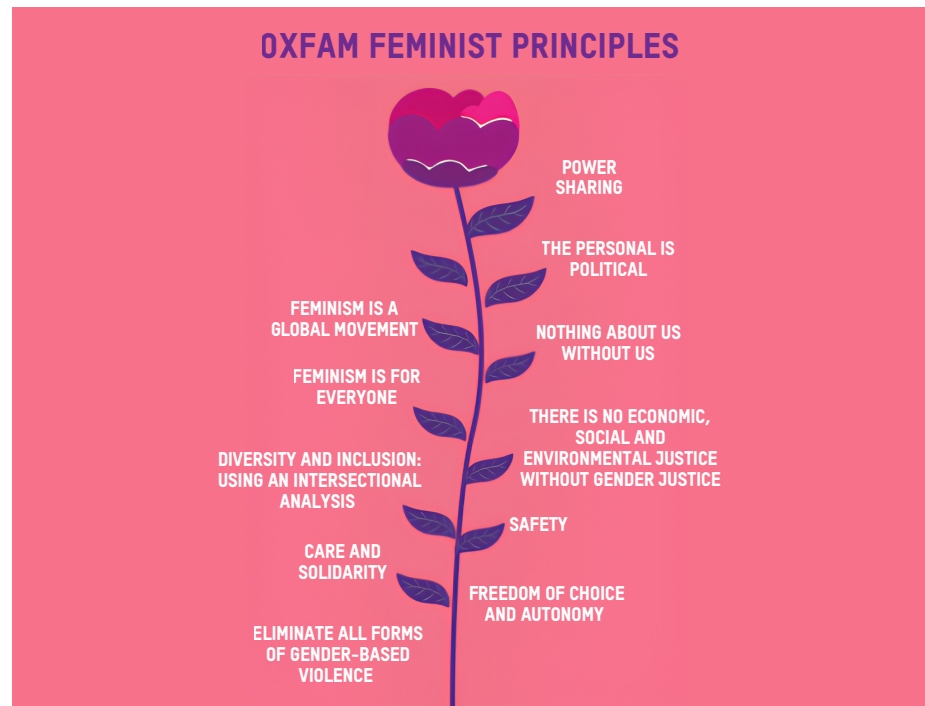
Oxfam's vision is a Just and Sustainable World. Our mission in Nepal as a humanitarian and development organization is to strengthen civic space and peoples' actions to end all forms of inequalities and social injustices, informed by a decolonial feminist lens rooted in the Global South.

We partner with feminist organizations, women's rights organizations, and diverse civil society networks to promote and strengthen local leadership. Our primary focus is advancing the leadership and meaningful participation of women, youth, and marginalized or vulnerable communities.

Gender justice lies at the heart of sustainable poverty reduction as it addresses the systemic and structural roots of inequality. We aim to transform the deeply rooted patriarchal and colonial systems that drive inequality. Through our Gender Justice Programme, we advance systemic change through three core actions: shifting resources, redefining the value of labor, and sharing decision-making power.

Shifting Resources: The Women's Rights Fund

The Women's Rights Fund (WRF) challenges the traditional top-down approach to aid. In the past, only a small percentage of global aid reached grassroots women's organizations. Oxfam's WRF has changed this by mobilizing a three-year, flexible funding mechanism to local partners in Kenya, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Lebanon and Nepal.



In Nepal, WRF has partnered with three grassroots women's organisations - Ujyalo Foundation, Women Association for Marginalized Women (WAM), and Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj. Such funding gives organizations the flexibility to invest in their own institutional priorities and strategic initiatives, allowing them to direct resources where they see the greatest need and opportunity for impact. Rooted in the feminist principle of "Nothing about us without us," the WRF recognizes that local leaders best understand the challenges and opportunities in their communities. The fund provides the financial support and autonomy they need to shape and lead their movements for change.

Redefining Value: Valuing Women's Work

Globally, women perform about 75 percent of unpaid care work, including cooking, cleaning, and caregiving that keeps society running. Oxfam has been actively advocating for a Care Economy that acknowledges, lessens, and shares this workload. Oxfam collaborates with governments and private sector to recognize care as productive work, reduce the burden through infrastructure like water pumps and electricity, redistribute the work more equally between men and women, and ensure women have representation in policymaking.

Sharing Power: Empowering Women Leaders

Transformative Feminist Leadership aims to reshape leadership guided by feminist principles.

Oxfam has been providing technical training in public speaking, local government budgeting, and proposal writing to women in various areas, this has empowered women to transition from marginalized observers to central decision-makers. The ultimate result of this shift is a profound change in the public agenda; when women lead, they prioritize holistic community welfare, investing in vital irrigation systems, school scholarships, and support for survivors of gender-based violence, creating a more resilient society that benefits everyone.

The Women's Rights Fund (WRF) represents Oxfam's strategic commitment to shifting power and resources directly into the hands of grassroots movements. By providing flexible, multi-year financing, the WRF empowers women's rights organizations (WROs) to invest in their own self-defined priorities.

Currently operating in Kenya, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Lebanon, and Nepal, the WRF focuses on supporting small, community-based WROs. Through these partnerships, the fund reaches and supports tens of thousands of individuals annually, proving that when local leaders have the resources they need, the impact is both profound and far-reaching.

Despite their important role, WROs are severely underfunded. The limited funding available usually comes with strict donor requirements that small, grassroots groups cannot meet. This lack of resources creates a cycle of limitations. The organizations face institutional stagnation, unable to invest in their staff or necessary infrastructure. It creates planning barriers, making long-term strategic growth impossible. Ultimately, this results in impact inhibition, where the inability to scale traps the organizations in a negative spiral that prevents them from expanding their reach or influence.

In Nepal, WRF has been supporting three WR0s since July 2025 to tackle systemic inequality through leadership, advocacy, and land reform.

Women Association for Marginalized Women (WAM): Established in 1997 in Karnali Province, WAM advocates for the most excluded populations, including Dalit and Indigenous women, those with disabilities, and sexual minorities. They mobilize resources to advance gender equity across political and economic spheres.

Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj: A veteran organization with 26 years of experience across 15 districts, focusing on the critical intersection of gender and land rights. The organization has been involved in grassroots campaigns for women's land and housing rights.



UJYALO FOUNDATION: FEMINIST LEADERSHIP FELLOWSHIP

Ujyalo Foundation, a young women-led NGO, is redefining leadership in Nepal. Since 2014, it has been operating as a unique leadership incubator, Feminist Leadership Fellowship, for women & girls (12+), fostering a growing network of more than 500 intersectional leaders. By combining capacity building with social entrepreneurship, the Foundation empowers women to occupy decision-making spaces.

This year's Feminist Leadership Fellowship (FLF) 2026, was conducted with the support of Oxfam's Women's Rights Fund (WRF), and highlights how flexible, feminist funding can catalyze both individual transformation and systemic change.

The 2026 fellowship focused on "Care in Motion: Feminist Leadership at the Intersections of Migration and Labor" explored the critical link between feminist leadership, migration, and labor. It brought together 13 fellows from all seven provinces of Nepal, majority of whom belonged to historically excluded communities. The cohort included a woman with disability, a transgender woman, and women impacted by landlessness, moving beyond inclusion towards a model of transformative, intersectional leadership.

The fellowship analyzed the intersectional care burdens placed on women, girls, and non-binary individuals, specifically in the context of internal and external labor migration. It examined how gender norms and identity-based inequalities reinforce these dynamics, while highlighting how care-related labor migration, are largely undertaken by women, often pushing them further into economic and social precarity.



Fellows from the 2026 Feminist Leadership Fellowship (FLF) gather following the successful conclusion of the program. Photo: Ujyalo Foundation

individually, WRF support proved vital in fostering feminist consciousness among participants. Fellows engaged in critical reflections on power dynamics, patriarchy, and intersectionality, which has strengthened their confidence, voice, and personal agency. This was facilitated by flexible, principle-driven funding that prioritized equity and care, creating safe environments for growth.

At the community level, WRF empowered fellows to launch four Community Advocacy Intervention (CAI) projects. These initiatives brought local struggles to light, including mental health impacts of youth migration, vulnerabilities faced by women migrant workers, burden of unpaid care work, and financial challenges experienced by landless returnee migrant women. This engaged more than 343 community members and stakeholders thereby fostering dialogue and informing policy conversations and drive local actions.

The impact of WRF extends beyond immediate outputs. It has contributed to shifting narratives, particularly in recognizing unpaid care work as both an economic and social issue, rather

than a private responsibility. For Ujyalo Foundation, WRF has also strengthened institutional capacity through policy reviews and investments in essential infrastructure.

The influence of the WRF transcends immediate outputs. It has played an important role in reframing unpaid care work as a collective economic and social priority rather than a private domestic burden.

Furthermore, Amuda Mishra, Ujyalo Foundation's Executive Director highlights, "The partnership has strengthened our organization's institutional framework through comprehensive policy evaluations and strategic infrastructure investments."

"WRF underscores the vital necessity of investing in leadership grounded in lived experience and collective action. The FLF 2026 journey serves as a powerful testament that when resources prioritize building agency, knowledge, and community-driven solutions, the resulting change is both profound and permanent," adds Amuda.

FROM GRASSROOTS TO GOVERNANCE: WAM'S JOURNEY IN EMPOWERING MARGINALIZED VOICES

The Women Association for Marginalized Women (WAM) is a rights-based organization dedicated to female empowerment based in Surkhet, Karnali Province. Established in 1997, the organization driven by a vision of an equitable society, mobilizes resources to advance gender equality and empower communities across social, economic, and political spheres. The organization specifically focuses on the intersections of marginalization, including Dalit and Indigenous women, women with disabilities, single women, and sexual and gender minorities, as well as conflict-affected individuals and vulnerable youth.

Since July 2025, WAM has utilized Oxfam's Women's Rights Fund (WRF) support to implement a strategic empowerment program, "Increasing Access to Policymaking through Women's Empowerment" in Karnali Province. This initiative has been instrumental in strengthening WAM's internal capacity while promoting social inclusion and leadership on a broader scale. A key achievement of the first year was policy-level reforms in collaboration with Karnali Provincial Government and local government. WAM has ensured that state actors are more responsive and responsible towards women's rights issues.

WAM successfully expanded its Gender Equality and Leadership Promotion Network (GELPN) through events such as Local-level Women's Conference in Birendranagar, Surkhet, Karnali Provincial Women's Conference.

These initiatives have made it easier to carry out advocacy and lobbying simultaneously across all 10 districts of Karnali Province. The formation of networks at local and provincial levels has played a vital role in increasing women's participation in decision-making processes and strengthening advocacy efforts.

WAM has enhanced leadership capacities across a diverse spectrum of community-based and civil society-based organizations, including women, men, and sexual and gender minorities, in Surkhet, Dailekh, Salyan, Rukum-West, and Jajarkot districts of the province. By delivering targeted training in gender equality, disability inclusion, and social equity, the organization has successfully broadened its reach and fostered inclusive leadership.

WAM has leveraged WRF funds to tackle menstrual discrimination, directly addressing a major obstacle to women's participation in public life. The impact is already visible in Birendranagar Municipality and Barahatal Rural Municipality, where local leaders and community stakeholders have embraced the concept of dignified menstruation. This shift in awareness has paved the way for new policy initiatives, with both local governments now initiating the development of guidelines for dignified menstrual management.

"The fund also supported in institutional growth, providing targeted management training to executive members, senior staff, and general members. This has enhanced leadership capabilities, fostered inclusive decision-making, and improved organizational accountability. Furthermore, the publication of a gender resource book has served as a vital educational tool, significantly advancing community-level knowledge on gender equality, disability inclusion, and social inclusion," shares Madhurani Dhakal, Executive Director at WAM.

Strategic partnerships with provincial and local governments, civil society, media, and other stakeholders have further expanded the organization's reach and influence. The initiatives supported by WRF fund have established a framework for WAM's long-term goals, successfully balancing internal institutional growth with social change.



A participant shares her reflections at the Karnali Feminist Conference, organized by WAM in Surkhet.
Photo: WAM

FROM EVICTION TO EMPOWERMENT: THE STRUGGLE FOR SECURE HOUSING

In Nepal, land is more than just a physical asset; it is connected to identity, livelihood, cultural status and social standing. Despite its importance, national statistics reveals a stark reality, millions of people are living as landless citizens, squatters, or in informal settlements. According to the Land Issues Resolution Commission's records, 1,152,870 families are seeking formal recognition out of which only 9,012 families have been granted land ownership certificates (Lalpurja) to date.

Despite numerous reform efforts, land distribution in Nepal remains unequal. This unequal power dynamics creates a double burden for landless and squatter women, who must navigate the systemic challenges of landlessness alongside gender-based marginalization.

Historically, land ownership in Nepal has been concentrated within a specific class. Although Nepal has established legal frameworks, structures, and systems, including constitutional provisions and land policies, to address land rights issues, the practical implementation remains challenging. As state authorities continue to issue 7-day or 35-day notices to remove structures built on government or public land, and with forced eviction attempts made periodically, fear and uncertainty have increased within the landless and squatter communities. Beyond the physical threat of losing their homes, these residents face systemic marginalization. They are forced to face inequality, discrimination, insecurity, and social injustice.



A participant presents group findings during a REFLECT discussion aimed at empowering women and youth activists. Photo: NMES

Against this backdrop, Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj (NMES) has been involved in advocacy and grassroots campaigns for women's land and housing rights across 15 districts for the past 26 years.

Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj has been chosen as one of the recipients of Women's Rights Fund (WRF) from Oxfam in Nepal since July 2025. The fund is being used by the organization to empower women activists at the community level to lead the fight against gender inequality and advocate for land rights. Furthermore, it seeks to prepare the younger generation and integrate land rights issues into the broader women's movement.

The fund was used in successfully preparing 78 women and youth activists from seven REFLECT discussion centers – six new and one reconstituted and two adolescent girl groups. They were trained in using creative mediums such as drama, painting, and poetry to challenge harmful myths and false narratives about landless communities and replacing them with truth and positive narratives. This helped bring land rights into the national spotlight.

Their collaborative networking with feminist networks, groups, organizations and Gen Z groups successfully integrated land and housing issues into 2025 election manifestos of Nepal's major political parties. Land and housing rights have now become a prominent and urgent topic of discussion. Furthermore, women land activists directly lobbied with 66 House of Representatives candidates to ensure land and housing security remained a priority.

"It is important for state authorities to approach the issue of landlessness with the seriousness it deserves. The state must move beyond the threat of forced evictions and prioritize long-term resettlement and management strategies over displacement. Furthermore, the Land Commission must be restructured into a fully empowered, autonomous body capable of resolving these issues through a systematic and transparent process," emphasizes Sanju Gurung, Program Coordinator at Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj.

VALUING WOMEN'S WORK

The global economy is built on a foundation of systemic inequality, where women's labor, ranging from unpaid household care to informal jobs is routinely undervalued. This neglect and undermining of unpaid care work is a primary driver of global poverty and reinforces deep-seated racial, gender, and migration-based inequalities.

In response to these systemic failures, Oxfam's Valuing Women's Work (VWW) program seeks to reimagine traditional economic models. Grounded in feminist economic justice and systems change, the program aims to build a society where informal workers and unpaid carers are the priority. VWW is a collaborative effort designed to disrupt the status quo, so that women informal workers along with unpaid care and domestic workers are at the centre and not the margins of economies.

Oxfam GB is investing in a global movement to drive global economic reform focussing on three transformative outcome areas: Shifting Power, Shifting Narratives and Shifting Metrics. These initiatives, currently taking root globally, serves as a vital part of a larger movement to promote feminist, just, and equitable economies worldwide.

Since 2022, Oxfam in Nepal has been advancing Valuing Women's Work through strategic activism and policy advocacy. A major highlight of this work in the first year was a national workshop for domestic workers in Kathmandu valley, which provided a platform for 20 workers to discuss their rights and the systemic failures they face. Key issues identified by the workers included remuneration, health protection, social security, leave and occupational hazards. This workshop highlighted a critical gap between legal provisions and actual practice; broadening Oxfam's scope to work with more partners and individuals who are directly affected.

To further this mission, Oxfam and partner organization Yuwalaya conducted a study "Building Voices for Women Domestic and Unpaid Care Workers in Nepal" in fiscal year 2023-2024 to understand the situation of paid and unpaid care work in Nepal. The study was conducted across 13 districts in all seven provinces and engaged 52 diverse stakeholders including government officials, trade unions, and civil society experts. The research underscored the vulnerability of these workers. While these women are economic backbones, they remain trapped in a cycle of exploitation, low wages, and isolation, often without the protection of formal contracts or social security. The report provided the evidence-based foundation needed to challenge the political invisibility of care labor and advocate for its formalization.

The initiative has achieved significant milestones in empowering women and shifting national policy. 20 women working in informal sector enhanced their Self Employment Schemes and initiated the group-based experimental enterprises/businesses while 71 women working as domestic workers received modern appliance training including Microwave Oven, Washing Machine, Air Fryer, Humidifier and Vacuum Cleaner which as enhanced their earning potential by reducing the physical burden of household tasks.

In a similar effort, a journalist fellowship trained 10 media professionals to amplify the voices of Domestic Women Workers and drive a meaningful shift in public narratives.

Simultaneously, strategic engagement with parliamentarians and the Labor Minister has secured high-level commitments to increase minimum wages and ratify ILO Convention 189, which would formally recognize and protect domestic and unpaid care labor. These efforts have sparked a national movement, further bolstered by the National Youth Council's formal recognition and funding of the Young Female Domestic Workers Network.

This momentum culminated in June 2025 with a series of provincial and national roundtables held in collaboration with WOREC and Yuwalaya. Attended by more than 200 stakeholders including representatives from human rights commissions, trade unions, and UN agencies these discussions provided a platform for experts to highlight the gap between existing laws and their implementation. These events served as a powerful catalyst for collective advocacy, reaffirming the state's responsibility to ensure decent work. With public support reinforced by 10 major news features and direct commitments from prominent leaders like former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Oxfam in Nepal's VWW initiative has successfully integrated domestic workers into the national agenda for a more inclusive and rights-based society.

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EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

With nearly twenty years of experience in the NGO sector, Indira Kumari Koirala, 52, has dedicated her life to the empowerment of women and the development of Santapur, Chandrapur Municipality in Rautahat district. Her long-standing commitment to community service continues today in her role as a Women Empowerment Centre (WEC) Facilitator. Working under the Empowering Her project in Brindaban Municipality, Indira remains a driving force for social progress in the district.

Empowering Her project is a KOICA public-private partnership implemented by Oxfam in Nepal in partnership with RDC Nepal in Rautahat district, Madhesh Province.

At the start of Indira's career, the hurdles faced by rural women were staggering. Restrictive social norms, a lack of educational access, and awareness of their rights barred women from financial independence and community leadership. Witnessing this systemic marginalization firsthand didn't just move Indira, it ignited a lifelong determination to create pathways for women's education and personal development, empowering them to step into leadership roles.



Indira Kumari Koirala leading a WEC session with community members in Rautahat. Photo: RDC Nepal

Joining the Empowering Her project was a pivotal moment in Indira's professional journey. By undergoing specialized training in Financial Literacy and Women's Leadership, she sharpened her expertise and gained the confidence to facilitate sessions that empower women to move towards economic independence.

Today, she translates complex financial concepts into practical lessons on saving, budgeting, and income generation. Her mentorship is helping local women take control of their household finances and start small enterprises, laying the foundation for long-term family security.

The leadership training Indira received has been transformative, enhancing her capacity for public advocacy and group facilitation. She uses these skills to encourage women to recognize their own potential and stand up for their rights. She serves as a bridge motivating her peers to step into community and political spaces. By doing so, she ensures that women are no longer silent observers, but active participants whose voices and concerns directly shape local decisions.

Indira's impact as a WEC facilitator extends far beyond organizing meetings and sessions. She serves as a mentor and catalyst, inspiring women to define their own goals and build skills needed to lead within their homes and neighbourhoods. This dedication has yielded remarkable results; women are increasingly taking charge of household financial planning and emerging as influential voices in community progress. Indira's story is a reminder that an empowered woman is a community transformed.

Through her dedication to teaching, leading, and encouraging others, she is helping reshape the social and economic landscape of her region. Her ongoing commitment to developing women as leaders and financial decision-makers continues to drive community-wide progress.

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FEEDBACK?

Do you have programme updates, stories, pictures, videos to share?
Or, any important questions on the newsletter? Please contact:

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